Housing as a Platform for Formerly Incarcerated Persons

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Introduction

The fourfold increase in incarceration rates in the United States over the past two decades has had sweeping consequences. Perhaps chief among them is the volume of men and women released from incarceration to the community annually and the attendant social and fiscal costs associated with their return. In 2009 alone, more than 730,000 individuals—about 2,000 people every day—were released from state and federal prisons to the community (Sabol and West 2010). Millions more, an estimated 9 million, are released from local jails annually (Beck 2006 as cited in Solomon et al. 2008). The process of release from incarceration to the community—known as reentry—has consequences not only for the men and women released but also for the family members who returning adults disproportionately rely on and for the disadvantaged communities where formerly incarcerated persons typically reside.

In addition to the social costs to individuals, families, and communities, there are significant public safety concerns and fiscal costs associated with reentry. Indeed, multistate estimates on the incidence of recidivism among individuals released from prison indicate that most are rearrested within three years of their release (Langan and Levin 2002), and between 40 and 50 percent are reincarcerated within three years of their release (Langan and Levin 2002; Pew Center on the States 2011). Though it is difficult to measure jail recidivism within and across different jurisdictions (see Lyman and LoBuglio 2006 for discussion), the population that flows through local jails is known to cycle in and out for relatively short periods (Solomon et al. 2008). Increases in the incarceration rate, coupled with the high rates of returns to prison, have resulted in burgeoning correctional expenditures over time. Annual state correctional expenditures topped more than $50 billion in recent years (Kyckelhahn 2010)—nearly three times the $17 billion spent in the early 1980s—and a handful of states spend more discretionary dollars on corrections than higher education (Pew Center on the States 2008).

Given the extensive public safety, social, and fiscal consequences associated with reentry, additional research is needed to understand how individuals can increase their chances of successful reentry and reintegration as they are released from prison and jail. Rigorous research should then lead to informed, evidence-based policy and practice. Reducing the number or rate of returns to incarceration is critical. In addition, successful reentry and reintegration encompasses more than reductions in reoffending and reincarceration; it includes changes in individual behaviors associated with reoffending and reincarceration, such as reductions in substance abuse and other risky behaviors, increased family functioning and social support, educational attainment, gainful employment opportunities and wages, and participation in prosocial activities, such as community groups, faith activities, and volunteer or recreational groups.

Against the backdrop of the reentry challenges, this paper discusses how housing can be a platform or pathway *toward* more successful reentry and reintegration for formerly incarcerated persons. While housing for formerly incarcerated persons is a source of necessary shelter and residential stability, it can also serve as the *literal* and *figurative* foundation for successful reentry and reintegration for released adults. While much of the extant research has detailed the challenges formerly incarcerated persons face once in the community, including finding appropriate and stable housing, very little research has focused on the ways housing, in and of itself, can support successful reentry and lead to better reintegration outcomes for the formerly incarcerated. To highlight the research gaps and outline potential ways to develop a broader understanding of housing as a foundation for successful reentry and reintegration, this paper contains five sections.

The next section briefly describes reentry challenges, including those experienced by people reentering society from prisons and jails and the differences associated with returning from prison versus jail. The following section discusses the available housing options for individuals released from prison and jail and outlines the complex housing challenges the reentry population faces once in the community. With an understanding of those challenges, this paper then discusses the theoretical reasons housing can be a platform for successful reentry, using the empirical literature as a base. Finally, the paper concludes with potential research projects that will fill critical gaps in our understanding of how housing can be a platform for the successful reentry and reintegration of formerly incarcerated persons in order to move both policy and practice forward.

Overview of Reentry Challenges

The challenges facing policymakers and practitioners in helping formerly incarcerated persons integrate successfully into society are multifaceted. Individuals are not prepared to navigate back into their communities, families struggle to address the needs of formerly incarcerated persons upon release, and communities are not prepared to meet the needs of the reentry population. It is important to understand and create systems, policies, or programs to assist in the reentry process, given that many barriers to successful reentry are associated with costly returns to prison or jail (i.e., recidivism).

Formerly incarcerated persons face myriad challenges upon release, from locating appropriate and stable housing, obtaining gainful employment, reuniting with their families and children, and receiving services for substance abuse and physical and mental health issues to meeting their more basic, elemental needs for clothing, food, and identification (Travis, Solomon, and Waul 2001; Travis and Visher 2005; Visher 2007). Indeed, formerly incarcerated persons are more likely to have issues with mental and physical illness, low educational attainment, poor work histories, and higher rates of substance abuse than the general population (Hammett, Roberts, and Kennedy 2001; Solomon et al. 2008). Much of what formerly incarcerated persons need following their release, such as housing and material support, is often provided by family members (Naser and La Vigne 2006; Visher and Courtney 2007), many of whom have limited educations and low incomes, and some of whom have their own criminal histories (Fontaine, Gilchrist-Scott, and Denver 2011). Yet, families are important sources of social support for formerly incarcerated persons (see Nelson, Deess, and Allen 1999; and Sullivan et al. 2002 for discussion), and strong family support is associated with higher employment rates and reduced substance abuse for the formerly incarcerated (La Vigne, Schollenberger, and Debus 2009; La Vigne, Visher, and Castro 2004; Visher, La Vigne, and Travis 2004). Reentry is also concentrated in certain neighborhoods, which are likely to be disadvantaged, disproportionately minority, and with low institutional investment (Lynch and Sabol 2001; La Vigne et al. 2003), the very type of neighborhoods associated with returns to prison (Kubrin and Stewart 2006).

It is important to acknowledge that the population released from local jails to the community differs from the prison reentry population in some important ways, which presents unique problems for reentry planning. In general, many individuals released from jail face similar post-release challenges as the released prison population. Of particular note, however, is the relatively high percentage of individuals in jail with mental illnesses. The combined effects of the deinstitutionalization of people with mental illnesses from psychiatric facilities, public assistance cuts, and decreased availability of affordable housing have increased the number of persons with mental illnesses who encounter the criminal justice system dramatically, particularly local jails (Goin 2004; New Freedom Commission on Mental Health 2003). As a result, many detained in local jails are chronic offenders who frequently cycle in and out of

the jail facility (and other public crisis systems) in part because of their long histories of residential instability or homelessness, chronic mental and physical health issues, and substance abuse disorders (Burt and Anderson 2005; Hall et al. 2009a; Metraux and Culhane 2004, 2006).

Those housed in jails return to the community after having served much shorter sentences than those released from prison—typically less than two years—or received no sentence at all (e.g., pre-trial population). The average length of stay in jails is less than one month, and a sizable group of individuals spend less than one week in jail (Beck 2006). Yet, the jail reentry population is more likely to have received limited or no services while incarcerated, compared with the prison population, despite having higher levels of service need (e.g., severe mental illness and substance abuse issues) (see Solomon et al. 2008 for discussion). Given individuals' relatively short length of stay in local jails, reentry planning is far more difficult there than it is in prisons, although it is no less important, particularly for the subset of the jail population with significant behavioral health issues and chronic offending histories (Fontaine, Gilchrist-Scott, and Horvath 2011).

Housing as a Complex Reentry Challenge

While employment and the other reentry challenges are important, it can certainly be argued that finding and securing adequate housing is chief among the reentry challenges that formerly incarcerated persons face. In fact, one could argue that securing employment, maintaining sobriety, or participating in prosocial activities, for example, are extremely difficult without stable housing. Understanding and describing the need for reentry housing is complex for two primary reasons. First, the need is both immediate and long term. Second, individuals' needs vary considerably, depending on their unique circumstances. And, unfortunately, there are systemic challenges that formerly incarcerated persons face when trying to find and access housing in the community. Each of these issues is discussed below.

Incarceration places individuals at an increased risk of housing instability and insecurity *immediately* upon their release from incarceration (Geller and Curtis 2011; Metraux, Roman, and Cho 2008). Quite simply, individuals released from prisons and jails need to secure a place to sleep on their very first night out of the correctional institution. For many, they return to their communities having only temporary housing arrangements (Visher and Farrell 2005; Visher et al. 2004); therefore, their initial housing placement in the community is nothing more than a "landing spot" or temporary destination.[1] Further, the housing individuals are able to secure on their first night out—such as an emergency shelter or living with a friend or family member with which there is a strained, unstable, or otherwise unsuitable relationship—may not be suitable as a long-term housing option (Roman and Travis 2004). In these circumstances, the need for housing is likely to change over time, becoming more or less urgent depending on the suitability of the initial housing placement.

Securing adequate permanent housing for the formerly incarcerated has been documented as a serious challenge local and state governments have found difficult to overcome. Systems are fragmented, and no particular agency is responsible for providing housing to individuals leaving prisons and jails (Cho et al. 2002; Roman and Travis 2004). Historically, correctional departments have viewed the provision of long-term housing for released prisoners as outside their agencies' mission or purview (see Travis 2005).

[1] This transience is partly exacerbated by some departments of correction policies requiring a fixed address before a person can be discharged. These policies can lead some prisoners to identify an address that is *only* temporary, such as an emergency shelter or a family member that has not been told about the prisoner's return but whose address the prisoner knows.

As a result, most released prisoners rely on their family and other social support networks for housing (and other needed services and supports) upon release. For example, the Urban Institute's multisite, longitudinal *Returning Home* study found that between 48 and 62 percent of returning prisoners slept at a relatives' house on their first night out of prison (La Vigne, Visher, et al. 2004; Visher and Courtney 2007). After a few months out of prison, more than 80 percent were living with a family member across the *Returning Home* study sites; only 20–40 percent of those living with family were paying rent (Visher et al. 2004).

While the *Returning Home* study and others demonstrate that housing with family members is the option formerly incarcerated persons are most likely to use in both the short and long term, it is unable to answer other key questions: whether housing with family is the most suitable or ideal option or, quite simply, whether housing with family is the only option; and, if given the choice, whether released prisoners and detainees would choose another housing option, and how that would affect individuals' reentry and reintegration outcomes over the short and long term. Considering that some share of formerly incarcerated persons' family members also struggle with substance abuse issues, their own criminal histories, limited incomes, and other issues, housing with family might be a less-than-ideal housing option for many individuals recently released.

In addition, individuals released from prisons and jails require different types of housing assistance over both the short and long term. The need for housing and housing assistance generally depends on individuals' employment histories and mental health and other disabilities. To state more generally, their need is based on their sociodemographic characteristics and previous experiences. It is widely known that not every individual released from prison or jail needs the same level of in-prison or post-release services, since individuals differ in their likelihood of reoffending and post-release success (Andrews and Bonta 1998; Weibush, McNulty, and Le 2000). Further, the notion of need for housing assistance encompasses many different levels of support. One person with complex issues might need an agency—private, nonprofit, or public—to provide temporary or permanent shelter, while another person might simply need assistance locating available, affordable housing options in the neighborhood where s/he expects to reside. Ideally, the provision of housing assistance should be targeted to individual needs, particularly considering the following basic example.

Recent national averages suggest that among the incarcerated population, including those in jail and prison, 80 percent have a history of drug abuse, 13 percent have a history of mental illness, 19 percent are illiterate, 40 percent are functionally illiterate, and 31 percent were unemployed before their arrest (Mellow and Christian 2008); in addition, more than 40 percent of inmates in state and federal prisons and local jails *have not* finished high school (Harlow 2003). Moreover, some individuals exhibit more than one of these characteristics. That is, some incarcerated individuals have a history of drug abuse, mental illness, and unemployment and are also illiterate and have not finished high school. While these statistics paint a sobering picture of individual' challenges, they also show the variation among released adults. For example, while statistics suggest that 80 percent of individuals have a history of drug abuse and, therefore, some share of this 80 percent may benefit from supportive housing to maintain sobriety upon release, they also show that 20 percent *do not* have a history of drug abuse and would likely not benefit from supportive housing. This is important to note, given that variation in individuals' challenges relates to their ability to reintegrate successfully (and their risk of returning to jail or prison).

In summary then, there is a need for both short-term and long-term housing options among a group of released adults from prison and jail that range from fairly self-sufficient to high need (or high risk). For released adults, some may need immediate assistance with housing upon release, particularly those

without family or social supports. This housing, however, may be appropriate as a temporary living arrangement only and an individual's need for permanent housing might change over time, perhaps several months following release. For released adults from jail, in particular, many might have been initially incarcerated because of their challenges with residential instability and chronic homelessness—particularly the population that suffers from mental illnesses and chronic substance abuse. And yet others released from jail may not need any assistance with housing, since their incarceration period was so short. The provision of short- and long-term housing for individuals targeted to their level of need could be the key to successful reentry.

Housing Options and Barriers

For the most part, like other citizens, the formerly incarcerated have several housing options available to them, depending on their level of self-sufficiency and history and prospects for employment. Yet, unlike other citizens, formerly incarcerated persons' access to these housing options, regardless of their level of self-sufficiency and employment prospects, is far more limited, for myriad reasons (see Roman and Travis 2004 for a more extensive discussion).

- First, formerly incarcerated persons can obtain housing through the private market, an option that requires relatively high self-sufficiency, appropriate mostly for those who have reasonably strong employment histories and can continue working to afford housing in the private market.
- Second, formerly incarcerated persons can obtain *federally subsidized housing units* through housing choice vouchers or public housing, for example. Subsidized housing is designed to help low-income individuals afford housing in the private market. This would be appropriate for formerly incarcerated persons with some history of employment and ability to continue working who simply need a little help finding housing.
- Third, released prisoners might be eligible for a number of *supportive housing programs*, many of which are also federally subsidized. Supportive housing programs might be transitional or permanent, generally geared toward those with histories of mental illnesses, physical illnesses, substance abuse disorders, or chronic homelessness/residential instability. In addition to the affordable housing unit, supportive housing services typically include coordinated case management, health and mental health services, substance abuse treatment, vocational and employment services, tenant advocacy, and life skills training. In general, supportive housing is appropriate for individuals who have a high need for these supportive services, who generally do not have strong work histories or the ability to work due to physical and/or mental health issues, substance abuse histories, or other disabilities.
- Fourth, *community correctional facilities* or halfway houses are available to released prisoners in some communities. These housing facilities are intended to help released prisoners transition from incarceration to the community by providing a more structured environment than would be available if the prisoner was released directly to the community. Halfway houses are used in both the federal and state correctional systems; they are typically operated by corrections departments, community corrections, or community organizations that are contracted through corrections departments. The use of halfway houses varies considerably: some states house only low-risk adults, while others house a number of adults regardless of risk. Some halfway houses offer supportive services and programs, while others function mostly as work-release centers.

- Finally, released prisoners or jail detainees might use *homeless shelters* or emergency housing upon release. While the use of shelters is a less-than-ideal housing option for formerly incarcerated persons experiencing short- or long-term homelessness after release, some formerly incarcerated persons, particularly those released from jails, find themselves in shelters immediately upon release (see Metraux et al. 2008 for discussion). The use of homeless shelters as a housing option for the formerly incarcerated demonstrates how critical temporary housing assistance is for reentry population.

While the aforementioned housing options are available in most locations, the ability of a formerly incarcerated person to access these five main housing options is limited for various reasons, including the following:

- *Limited work histories, low incomes, and lack of affordable housing*—Most individuals released from prison and jail cannot afford to buy or rent housing in the private market (Bradley et al. 2001). Further, former prisoners often return disproportionately to a few neighborhoods or communities within large metropolitan areas (Council of State Governments 2005), many of which have shortages of affordable housing (Hammett et al. 2001). The current economic crisis has exacerbated the shortage of affordable housing, particularly for low-income households (Pelletiere 2009), of which formerly incarcerated persons are likely to be a part. Since the formerly incarcerated have a difficult time finding and maintaining employment (Kachnowski 2005; La Vigne, Wolf, and Jannetta 2004; Visher, Debus, and Yahner 2008), the lack of affordable housing in the communities to which they return is a major barrier to securing housing (Gunnison and Helfgott 2010).
- *Challenges securing federally subsidized housing*—There is an overall shortage of federally subsidized housing units, illustrated by long waiting lists and lotteries for public housing units or housing choice vouchers (Hammett et al. 2001). Further, federal and local housing authorities' laws concerning eligibility for public housing make it more difficult for the formerly incarcerated to obtain federally subsidized housing (Roman and Travis 2004). Though recent language from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development strongly encourages local public housing authorities to make the federally subsidized housing developments they operate more accessible to the formerly incarcerated, many—particularly drug offenders—have long been denied public housing access (see Rubinstein and Mukamal 2002 for discussion).
- *Insufficient housing assistance*—Services to assist soon-to-be released or recently released prisoners in securing housing are not widespread. Since most sentences are mandated by legislation and no longer decided by parole boards, prisoners in many states are not required to have housing plans in place before being eligible for release (Visher and Travis 2003). Many individuals are released from state prisons without a housing plan. Further, there is a lack of discharge planning and linking prisoners to services in the community before release (Hammett et al. 2001). Often, recently released prisoners have difficulties meeting their housing (and other) needs because they are not fully aware of the services available to them in the community (La Vigne et al. 2004).
- *Resistance by landlords and community residents*—The development of transitional and supportive housing in communities for formerly incarcerated persons is often impeded by "not in my backyard," or NIMBY, attitudes (Visher and Farrell 2005). Resistance to housing for formerly incarcerated persons is typically greatest when it is developed specifically for those with substance abuse problems (Roman and Travis 2004). Resistance can be fought, however, by actively seeking the input and cooperation of the communities to which prisoners return (Fontaine, Roman, and Burt 2010; Roman, Kane, and Giridharadas 2006). Lastly, landlords often discriminate against the

formerly incarcerated, which is particularly problematic for those individuals seeking housing in the private market. It is a routine practice for landlords to conduct criminal background checks for apartment applicants, and those with criminal histories are the most likely to be rejected in tight housing markets (Roman and Travis 2004).

Housing as a Platform for Formerly Incarcerated Persons

Several housing options are available to formerly incarcerated persons in the community, though there is very little research on how housing can be a platform from which successful reentry can be launched. As just reviewed, there is ample research on the general need for temporary and permanent housing among the formerly incarcerated, the challenges associated with finding housing, and some research on how housing is associated with recidivism. Yet, with a few notable exceptions discussed below, the research is scant on how specific housing models, in and of themselves, can lead to better outcomes for formerly incarcerated persons and the specific characteristics of housing models that can improve outcomes.

Research on Oxford Houses, as a specific housing treatment model for individuals with histories of substance abuse, has shown them to be effective as a platform. The Oxford House model, based on the principles of self-governance and mutual support, is innovative in that it operates without any professional staff. Each house comprises approximately one dozen residents who agree to pay rent and help with house maintenance and upkeep, refrain from alcohol and substance use, and avoid disruptive behavior. There is no mandated length of stay or limit on how long individuals can be residents (Jason and Ferrari 2010). Research on the effectiveness of Oxford Houses is strong. Extant research has shown that individuals with substance abuse histories who live in Oxford Houses are less likely to reoffend, are less likely to use substances, are more likely to be employed, and spend less time engaged in criminal activities (Jason and Ferrari 2010; Jason et al. 2006). Peer-led, mutual help models like Oxford Houses have been shown to provide positive peer networks (Olson et al. 2005; Wexler 1995), which are associated with reduced recidivism among the formerly incarcerated (Broome et al. 1996). Yet, while the research support is strong and provides evidence on what aspects of the housing relate to positive outcomes (i.e., peer support), the Oxford House model is appropriate for only a subset of those released from prisons and jails (i.e., those released with substance abuse issues who agree to a peer-led recovery model).

Research has also shown that supportive housing is an effective platform for individuals with histories of chronic residential instability, mental illness, and institutional cycling. Supportive housing models combine permanent, affordable housing with supportive services aimed at helping residents maintain housing stability. Retention rates for the population with histories of homelessness and mental illness range between 75 to 85 percent after one year, even among those with the most severe homelessness, psychiatric, and substance abuse histories (Barrow, Soto, and Cardova 2004; Martinez and Burt 2006; Wong et al. 2006). Supportive housing has been found effective in decreasing shelter use, incarceration, inpatient hospital stays, and emergency room visits and their associated costs among persons with histories of residential instability and mental illness (see Culhane, Metraux, and Hadley 2002 for review).

One research study on supportive housing models targeted specifically to the reentry population is promising. The New York City Frequent Users Service Enhancement Initiative (FUSE) provided permanent supportive housing to individuals with extensive histories of homelessness and incarceration released from the Rikers Island Jail in New York City. A quasi-experimental evaluation of FUSE found

significant reductions in jail and shelter outcomes (Corporation for Supportive Housing 2009). That is, the housing placements were associated with greater residential stability for former jail detainees. Although there is an increased awareness of the role of supportive housing in reducing institutional cycling, questions of best practices in providing housing for the reentry population specifically are only now being answered (Fontaine et al. 2010). Yet, studies on supportive housing seem to suggest that supportive housing can reduce service use among formerly incarcerated persons with extensive histories of homelessness and incarceration.

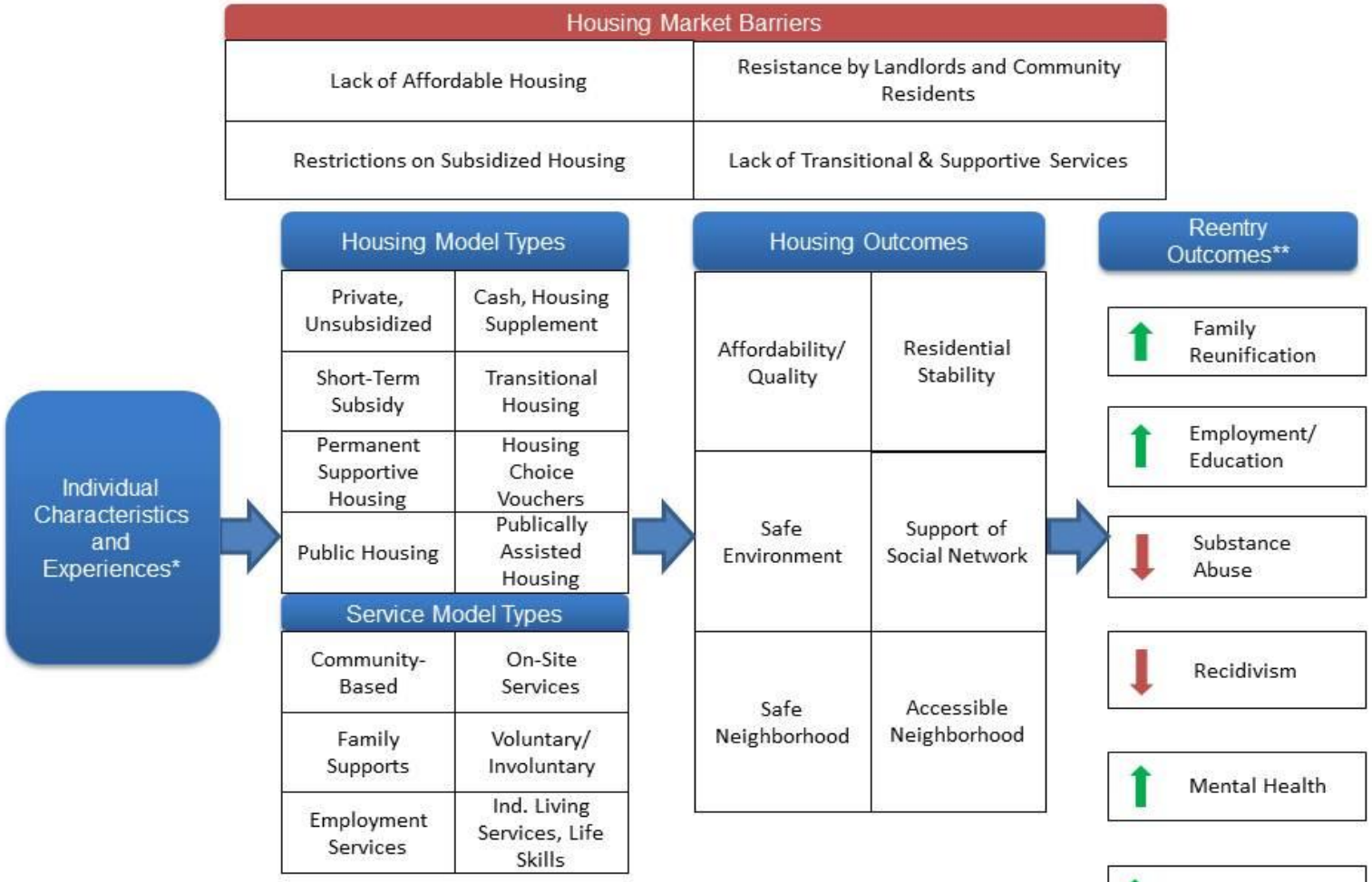
Notwithstanding the promising literature on the Oxford Houses and supportive housing models, additional information is needed about how housing can serve as a platform or pathway to successful outcomes for *all* formerly incarcerated persons (see Figure 1). This can be done by exploring first, how different housing models (temporary and permanent) and service packages can improve outcomes for all formerly incarcerated persons; and second, by exploring which dimensions of housing—such as quality, affordability, and location—are critical to positive outcomes.

First, theoretically, housing could be a critical component of reentry and reintegration for the entire reentry population. Housing instability impedes an adult's ability to be successful in various areas, most notably employment (Bradley et al. 2001). For the formerly incarcerated in particular, housing instability is a barrier to sustained employment and family reunification (Graffam, Shinkfield, and McPherson 2004; Roman and Travis 2004). Therefore, different housing models and service packages that focus on providing residential stability may improve outcomes for formerly incarcerated persons. That is, helping the formerly incarcerated stabilize in housing, with services to support them if necessary, could lead to improved family functioning and support; increases in gainful employment, educational attainment, and mental and physical health functioning; and decreases in substance abuse and returns to offending. As previously mentioned, different housing models are appropriate for different subpopulations of the formerly incarcerated. Similarly, the appropriate level and type of services that are attached to the housing also depend on the need among the released prisoners or detainees. In addition, various policies and practices—both formal (e.g., local housing authority laws) and informal (e.g., NIMBY attitudes among local residents)—restrict access to certain housing models for formerly incarcerated persons.

Second, theoretically, many aspects or characteristics of housing, of whatever model, could be related to positive outcomes. These include the stability, quality, and affordability of the actual housing unit as well as the location of the housing. Characteristics of the housing unit and its location may increase formerly incarcerated persons' access to gainful employment and educational opportunities, ability to reunify (and perhaps support) family and friends, feelings of safety and security, and receipt of necessary services for physical or mental health issues and other disabilities. The location of the housing unit—particularly if it is in a neighborhood that differs from where the released prisoner was living before prison—may also afford adults the opportunity to separate themselves from the former social networks and opportunities that originally contributed to their criminal activity (Kirk 2009, forthcoming). As previously mentioned, research has shown that released prisoners disproportionately return to a few, often clustered, neighborhoods with high social and economic disadvantage and low institutional investment (La Vigne et al. 2003; Lynch and Sabol 2001). This is problematic because released prisoners who return to these disadvantaged neighborhoods have a higher risk of reoffending than those who do not return to such neighborhoods (Kubrin and Stewart 2006; Yahner and Visher 2008). Further, those who return to a different neighborhood than the one where they were arrested are less likely to recidivate than those who return to their old neighborhood (Kirk 2009, forthcoming; Yahner and Visher 2008).

Research on the effects of residential mobility once a former prisoner is released to the community is mixed. One study suggests that every change in residence among former prisoners is associated with a 70 percent increase in the odds of recidivism (Makarios, Steiner, and Travis 2010), though another study indicates that residential mobility in the community does not place formerly incarcerated persons at a greater risk of recidivism, perhaps because mobility is a sign of increased financial responsibility (La Vigne and Parthasarathy 2005) or because the formerly incarcerated are leaving temporary housing placements that did not support their reentry goals. Indeed, researchers have found that residing on one's own instead of relying on family and friends for housing is related to lower recidivism rates among released prisoners in Illinois (Yahner and Visher 2008). More information is needed on whether residential moves upon release are for positive or negative reasons and how that contributes to formerly incarcerated persons' reentry and reintegration outcomes. As mentioned previously, as many former prisoners only have temporary housing arrangements upon release, their movement to another housing placement could be a move toward a more permanent, sustainable housing solution.

Figure 1. Pathways Model



*Including behavioral health status, education history, and work history
** Changes in some reentry outcomes might not be associated with changes in other reentry outcomes.

Potential Plan for Future Analysis

Given what is known about the importance of housing for formerly incarcerated persons, four lines of research (that build on each other) would help to understand how housing can be a platform for the formerly incarcerated and move policy and practice forward. The overall goal would be to explore how housing leads to positive outcomes, such as reductions in recidivism and improvements in overall well-being, of formerly incarcerated persons. That is, how does housing, including different housing and service models and the characteristics of the housing and services, lead to outcomes associated with reintegration, including but not limited to reductions in returns to prison or jail? Other outcomes include family reunification and family support, higher educational attainment, finding and maintaining gainful employment, physical and mental health functioning, and abstaining from substance abuse and other risky behaviors (see Figure 1).

Before turning to avenues for answering this broad question, it is critical to acknowledge that the pathways or connections between different reentry outcomes are complex. Improvements on one reentry outcome might not be associated with improvements in other reentry outcomes and changes might be more proximate for some outcomes than for others. For example, a housing placement that increases former prisoners' mental health might also decrease their substance use but will not necessarily lead to recidivism reductions. In another example, a housing placement might lead to reductions in recidivism, while having no effect on an individuals' likelihood or propensity to use substances. In one study of a supportive housing program for individuals with chronic homelessness and mental illness released from jail, some individuals who received housing recidivated while staying on their medications (an indicator of increased mental stability) while others stayed out of jail but continued to use substances (Fontaine, Gilchrist-Scott, and Horvath 2011).

To answer this broader question, four preliminary questions should be answered, potentially through the research projects outlined in Table 1.

1. What is the *specific need* for housing among formerly incarcerated persons/soon-to-be released persons?
2. What is the capacity of agencies, including government, service providers, and community- and faith-based organizations, to *provide housing* to formerly incarcerated persons/soon-to-be released persons?
3. What is the capacity of departments of corrections, including community corrections, to *link* formerly incarcerated persons/soon-to-be released persons to the type of housing they need in the community? What factors impede their capacity?
4. Does housing, once properly matched to need, lead to better outcomes for formerly incarcerated persons (i.e., prosocial activities, stronger family ties, educational attainment, gainful employment, reductions in substance abuse, criminal activity, etc.)? How?

First, it is critical to understand the need for housing and housing assistance among released adults in a given city or state, or perhaps, within one correctional facility. As previously mentioned, the need for housing, services, and housing assistance varies considerably among released adults, theoretically. While many people released from prison and jail have limited employment and education histories, others have relatively strong employment and education histories that make them much better able to

find housing on their own or with minimal assistance. Or, they have strong social support networks that are able to actually house them or assist with housing. A better understanding of how many people need what types of housing is a first step toward understanding how housing can lead to better outcomes. The need for housing and housing assistance likely varies across places, given the types of people released from prisons and jails in any one place, their socioeconomic characteristics, and the services and trainings received while incarcerated. Understanding individuals' needs for housing and housing assistance should ideally be part of discharge planning. It is also likely that the need for housing and housing assistance varies over time, particularly if individual's initial housing placement is temporary. In that sense, information gleaned from agencies that interact with formerly incarcerated people once they are in the community would be informative. Much can likely be learned by integrating data from departments of corrections, shelters, and housing agencies on individuals' use of housing following release from prison and jail and how that changes over time.

Second, once an understanding of the housing need among soon-to-be-released individuals is established in a given city, state, or facility, a next step would be to understand the capacity of local agencies to provide housing and housing assistance. Depending on the level of need among released adults for housing, services, and housing assistance, understanding the ability *and* willingness of agencies, including government, community- and faith-based agencies, and other nonprofits, to provide housing assistance or housing in a community would be a necessary next step. In this way, an understanding of the relative gap or mismatch in service need and service availability would be understood (see Hall et al. 2009b for example).

Third, it is critical to understand how correctional departments, including community corrections, can link individuals to community-based housing services. Certainly, it is much easier for corrections departments to link individuals to transitional housing or halfway houses that they manage than it is to link them to supportive housing units managed by other agencies. Linking to supportive housing providers, for example, is further challenged if these agencies are unknown to the correctional department or have not worked directly with the reentry population previously (e.g., picking individuals up at the facility, having access and experience conducting jail/prison in-reach). For example, a survey of permanent supportive housing agencies in the District of Columbia found that only 2 percent of their current population in supportive housing came to them through a direct link from the prison or jail (Hall et al. 2009b). Discharge planning is critical to getting individuals stable in housing before they are able to relapse into bad behavior. Targeted assessments built into the reentry planning process should enable people to succeed once they have been released (Healy 1999; Petersilia 2003; Travis 2005). In addition, cooperation between corrections and service providers is needed so the service providers are aware of important information like the time and date of release to better arrange assistance for the released individuals at this critical moment (Roman et al. 2006).

After the first three questions have been answered, the fourth question is whether individuals who are appropriately linked to housing and housing assistance have better outcomes than individuals who do not have housing or housing assistance. The reason the matching is critical is that some formerly incarcerated persons are likely to see failure if they are in a housing model or provided with housing assistance not suited to their needs. For example, individuals with histories of mental illness, substance abuse, and residential instability are likely to be unsuccessful in a housing model that requires more self-sufficiency (e.g., trying to locate private-market housing on their own or being placed into transitional housing with no supportive services). At the opposite extreme, an individual who has a relatively high level of self-sufficiency but no job lined up or social supports to rely on may be unsuccessful post-release without a temporary housing placement. Then, the question of how housing and its characteristics lead

to better reentry outcomes among the formerly incarcerated can be answered. If the matching is not accurate, then assessments or evaluations of the housing and housing assistance might be inappropriate. As mentioned, the outcomes attendant to a suitable housing placement might vary across people and over time; that is, housing might affect individuals' likelihood to return to incarceration while not affecting their use of illegal substances. Additional information on the causal and temporal links between reentry and reintegration outcomes is critical to understanding how housing is beneficial, for whom, and under what circumstances. Additional questions about the relative benefit of whether a temporary housing placement, if provided, leads to more stability and increases prospects for permanent housing and better reentry outcomes are also unanswered. That is, how do individuals need and use housing following release from prison?

Finally, it would also be important to inform the field how correctional departments, service provider agencies, and other agencies should assess the need for housing among prisoners and jail detainees, the community capacity for providing housing and housing assistance, and the capacity for correctional departments to link formerly incarcerated persons to housing and housing assistance. Practitioner-oriented guidebooks and training and technical assistance could be created to assist jurisdictions in conducting this type of work. Additional information on how these assessments or scans could be better streamlined, routinized, or made more efficient would also be warranted.

Conclusion

Housing, as a specific service, for formerly incarcerated persons is a critical component in the reentry process. The literature is clear that formerly incarcerated persons' pathways to housing are challenged. Additional research on how housing *can be* a pathway to successful reentry and reintegration would be critical to the field's understanding of how to support the formerly incarcerated in their reentry goals. By extension, this research would help family members of formerly incarcerated persons, the communities where they return, and society at large. The proposed research projects could be a first step toward better understanding the importance of housing, which could lead to better discharge and reentry planning in correctional facilities and greater coordination among community-based service providers and correctional departments.

Table 1: Potential Research Projects

Research questions	Potential research projects
What is the need for housing and housing assistance among formerly incarcerated persons/soon-to-be-released persons?	• Surveys/scans of housing need, including temporary and permanent housing, housing with supportive services, etc.) among soon-to-be-released prisoners/detainees and persons recently released from prison and jail • National administrative reviews of booking and admissions data on factors associated with residential instability (i.e., homelessness at arrest, history of homelessness, mental illness)
What is the capacity of agencies to provide housing and housing assistance to soon-to-be-released/formerly incarcerated persons?	• Surveys/scans of housing units available, by housing model and services, for formerly incarcerated persons • Surveys/scans of housing providers' ability and willingness to rent and serve formerly incarcerated persons • Surveys/scans of local public housing authorities' and other service provider agencies' tools, practices, and procedures used to rent and serve formerly incarcerated persons and soon-to-be released prisoners/detainees
What is the capacity of correctional departments to link soon-to-be-released/formerly incarcerated persons to housing and housing assistance?	• National review of the administrative tools, practices, and procedures correctional departments (including community corrections) use to facilitate post-release housing for prisoners and detainees • National evaluation/assessment of the discharge planning process in jails and prisons, related to successful linkage to housing
Does housing lead to improved outcomes among the formerly incarcerated population—including those from prison and jail—at varying levels of housing need? How?	• Experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation of different housing models for the different reentry populations (i.e., based on need) with sufficiently long follow-up period

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